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Repository Citation

Merrimack College (2014). The Broadsheet- Issue 7., 1-6.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.merrimack.edu/broadsheet/7>

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THE BROADSHEET

Issue VII, April 2014

Student Profile: Chris Mason

by Alison Leonard

As an intern for CBS Radio in Brighton, Senior English major and Business Administration minor Chris Mason has successfully combined his interest in sports and writing, paving the way for his dream career as a sports journalist. Mason landed the internship in January after seeing a posting on their website, and has done a variety of tasks in his role since. Working specifically for 98.5 *The SportsHub*, Mason assists with the Gresh and Zolak show by attending production meetings and transcribing website posts. In addition, he works in the digital department writing articles about local sports teams, posting videos, and creating photo galleries for the Sports section of CBS Boston's website.



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Bob Finch with Professor Vatalaro at the Writers House

Acclaimed Cape Cod Writer Robert Finch Reads at the Writers House

by Alison Leonard

As I sat in the Writers House listening to non-fiction prose writer Robert Finch read material about the Great Beach, which stretches from Provincetown to Chatham, I could not help but look behind him and out the windows of the Writers House at the trees starting to come back to life in the warm springtime sun. After such a long, trying winter, it's difficult to imagine anyone would be willing to relinquish such a comforting sight. Yet, Finch's beautifully captivating descriptions of Cape Cod entirely made me wish that I was instead looking upon the crashing blue waves and virtually endless stretches of beach he was describing. With each passage he read, I could almost feel the salty breeze on my skin and hear the ocean rushing at the shore.

However, Finch provided more than just eloquent descriptions of the Cape Cod landscape during his reading. In his wonderfully crafted prose he meditated upon the relationship between man and nature, exploring parallels and intersections between life and the beach. In a particularly moving passage, Finch explained how the constantly changing landscape of the Outer Cape, with its rogue waves, undertows, and powerful, cutting winds, mirrors the need to overcome challenges and adapt throughout one's own life. In addition, as a means to capturing how life has both wonderful and difficult moments, Finch consistently described Cape Cod as peaceful, yet destructive. From Finch's point of view, there appears to be something calming about witnessing the haphazard ways in which the waves erode the beach, changing the landscape at every turn, but always remaining beautiful.

In addition to making the audience think about such parallels and relationships, Finch was also able to make them laugh, showing the breadth of his talent. In particular, he extended his metaphors between life and the beach to include even human sexuality, doing so in a comical way. It seemed as if, for Finch, there is no aspect of life not reflected somehow in or connected to the unique

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An official publication of the Merrimack College English Department, The Broadsheet is published monthly during the academic calendar year. Its mission is to celebrate the English Department's role in promoting the literary arts on campus, to acknowledge the accomplishments of faculty and students, to profile students and alumni, and to create a forum in which issues relevant to English studies can be discussed.

*Finch cont. from p. 1**Mason cont. from p. 1*

A self-described sports nerd, Mason explains, "I'm always watching sports somewhere, and I love playing pick-up games with my buddies." Mason hopes to translate this passion for sports and his talent for writing into a career after graduation. "I'd love to get into sports journalism," he says. "I'm not letting the dream of getting paid to watch sports die." Although CBS isn't currently hiring, Mason's experience with them will certainly help him as he begins to apply for jobs with local newspapers.

Sports and writing have also been integral parts of his experience at Merrimack. He currently writes for the Sports section of *The Beacon*, and also works as a tutor in the Writing Center, assisting students from all academic backgrounds. Mason also looks fondly on his experiences in the English department. "I believe we have one of the brightest communities on campus, and it really shows when debates spring up in English courses," he explains. Mason cites Dr. Branca's *Beowulf* class and the discussions held in Dr. McWhorter's classes as some of his favorite memories.

Mason also made the most of his time in college by studying abroad in Dublin during the spring of his junior year. Another of his favorite trips was when he got to attend this year's Super Bowl in New Jersey with his father, something he describes as a "surreal experience." When he's not watching or writing about sports, you can find Mason bartending at Rolf's Pub or watching HBO's "True Detective."

landscape of the Outer Beach. However, as he described, the viewer/explorer is just as important as the landscape. In one of his personal essays, Finch discussed a visit he had from a friend of his who lives in the Berkshires and was experiencing a difficult time in his life. This friend felt more of a connection with the stability of the mountains than with the chaotic ocean swells of the Cape. For each individual, it would seem, different landscapes cultivate different perspectives and establish different bonds.

Finch's unique relationship with the Cape Cod landscape undoubtedly comes from an intimacy born from decades of exploration and close examination. He has lived on the Cape for over forty years, and has become well-known for his writing. His radio show, entitled "A Cape Cod Notebook," which continues to air on WCAI, won the 2006 New England Edward R. Murrow Award for Best Radio Writing. In addition, he has published numerous essays and books, the first of which, *Common Ground*, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. He was also awarded the New England Booksellers' Award for lifetime achievement in Non-Fiction in 2001.

Before the reading, Finch met with students from Professor Paul Vatalaro's "The New England Shore" seminar to discuss his own work, in addition to the work of other New England coastal writers, such as John Hay, Henry Beston and William Sargent. This meeting was particularly fitting, as the class involves field excursions to local coastal locations, including the Cape Cod National Seashore. Though Finch said he was pleased to visit the North Shore, I'm sure I was not the only one in the audience envious that he would be returning to his home in Wellfleet.



Exploring the New England Shore

by Alexandra Lynch

It was the time of year when the sun just begins to beat down its warm rays again while the wind is still clinging to the blistery feel of winter. I, as others did, had cleared my schedule weeks ahead of time in anticipation for this day, and there we were, standing amidst the Provincelands dunes of the Outer Cape on a Saturday “class.”

The New England Shore was a pilot course, conceived by Dr. Branca and Dr. Vatalaro, designed to give students an opportunity to study the effects of regional climate on a body of writing and to experience the characteristics of that climate for themselves. They also saw the course as an opportunity for the English program to begin taking better advantage of its location. Dr. Vatalaro, who taught the seminar, decided it should include a site visit to the Outer Cape, as well as another short trip to Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, located on Plum Island, Massachusetts. Students in the course could now not only read about the New England coastal climate and its connections to literature, but also truly feel it for themselves. Junior English major Michelle Norton says of the trips: “Our senses are charged by an inner understanding of setting and mood when we read, so being in the actual place and weather of a writer's home, or place of focus, was enlightening. The excursions shaped the course to be something beyond classroom discussions into experiential learning vital to thorough analysis of our course material.” Senior Environmental Studies and Sustainability major Jonathan Stringi attests to this observation, saying, “I was able to have my own experiences in nature by visiting these locations and could compare and contrast my experience with the writers’ experiences.”

A highlight of the course was that students got to meet award winning Cape Cod naturalist writer Robert Finch, whose books include *Common Ground*, *The Primal Place*, *Outlands*, and *The Cape Itself*. The

Writers House hosted Finch for a meeting with The New England Shore class group, which was followed by a reading of what will become a new book Finch is writing devoted to the Great Beach of the Outer Cape. “The opportunity to meet with Bob Finch was a privilege that I feel extraordinarily lucky to have had...” senior English major Bobby DiSorbo says. “The ability to hear a writer that I was studying, in his own voice, explain what he believed were the undercurrents of his body of work was invaluable.”

Students in the course also read Henry Beston’s *The Outermost House*, a collection of writing by John Hay,

Celia Thaxter’s *Among the Isles of Shoals*, William Sargent’s *The House on Ipswich Marsh*, and Wyman Richardson’s *The House on Nauset Marsh*. In reading these works, the class focused consistently on one question: How does the New England coastal climate shape writers who reside and/or were born here? Tony Rossetti, a junior English major, observes, “The New England coast's mercurial

environment changes from week

to week, and sometimes day to day -- so much so that one could experience the harsh winds of a nasty Nor'easter and the calm sun of a 65 degree day all within the span of a week. It has imbued the writers enamored by it with a great reverence for both its destructiveness and its restorative powers, engendering a deeper understanding of man's fragile connection with nature.”

By walking some of the same pathways as the writers they have been reading, the students of The New England Shore have proved that this new type of course offering is not only a successful, but more importantly an enjoyable, way to study literature. Dr. Vatalaro says he plans to offer a second iteration of the course during the fall of 2015, adding one more field excursion to the Outer Cape, and two new texts, Thoreau's *Cape Cod* and Huntington's *The Salt House*. The course will be capped at 12 students and it will feature the same mixture of critical and creative assignments.

Courtesy of Dr. Branca



Prepared for the Next Chapter

by Alison Leonard and Laura Stevens



When we first met as sophomores, it was uncanny to see just how much we had in common. Both of us were commuters double majoring in English and Psychology and we clicked pretty instantly, gossiping and telling stories on the first floor couches in Sullivan Hall. Since then, we have shared multiple classes in both departments, and were excited to learn last year that we would also be working together on *The Broadsheet*, one of the English department's newest internship initiatives. And, as of February, both of us are now licensed Zumba® instructors; Laura's fun, energetic classes finally inspired Alison to take the leap!

While college has at times been challenging and stressful, it has also been an amazingly educational, rewarding, and fun experience, especially considering all the wonderful friends we've made—like each other. No one can deny the importance of academics—certainly not perfectionists like the two of us—but to us, college has been about so much more than papers and tests. It has been about discovering who we are and who we would like to become in the future, and about meeting the people who have influenced that journey—friends and professors alike.

The English department specifically has been hugely influential in our time at Merrimack. They've done so much more than just get us excited about literature. They've made us believe in ourselves, strengthened our skills, and have helped immensely in preparing us for the next chapter in our lives. In turn, it's been wonderful for us to see the English department grow and change so significantly in just the short time we've been here, as well. We've loved seeing members of the department so energetic and excited, especially Professor Vatalaro, with whom we've worked closely on this new newsletter. With his enthusiasm and guidance, we have no doubt that *The Broadsheet* will continue to provide an excellent internship experience for other students like us. We would like to thank all of the professors and Helene for making us feel so welcome during our time here.

As our time at Merrimack comes to a close, we know many aspects about our lives are about to change. Laura will be pursuing a Masters degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and a career as a guidance counselor, while Alison will be busy working on a Masters in Public Relations at Boston University. But while we no longer have the same classes and internships to keep us together, we'll still have plenty to catch up on over coffee—our new schools and lives, maybe some new Zumba® choreography, and definitely some reminiscing about our time at Merrimack College.

Making a Poem Sound Right: Andrea Cohen Reads at the Writers House

by The Broadsheet Staff

When a poet reads from her own work, voice revitalizes words. The experience can be a powerful one, especially for someone attending a poetry reading for the first time. On Thursday, April 10, students enrolled in the Introduction to Poetry course, who had spent weeks studying Director Andrea Cohen's 2011 volume *Kentucky Derby*, got the opportunity to hear her perform a reading of her own work at the Writers House.

Cohen read several poems from *Kentucky Derby*, especially those students had earmarked at their favorites, such as “To Whom It May Concern” and “Self Portrait with Chainsaw,” along with many new poems that will appear in a forthcoming volume titled *Furs Not Mine*. Students were delighted that Cohen often commented on the backgrounds of poems before she read them. She closed by fielding questions from the audience, many of which students had raised during class discussion—about writing and revising, about the presence of autobiography in her poetry, about how and when one comes to write poems in the first place, and about the importance of a poem sounding right.

Interviewed after the reading, Sports Medicine major Jocelyn McClain said, “after studying *Kentucky Derby* by Andrea Cohen I knew she was one of my favorite authors, but listening to her speak her own poems gave me a completely new appreciation of her work. It added a new level of emotion into each one. It's one thing to simply read words on a page or even to read them aloud to yourself, but only the poet can truly feel and read the poems the way they are meant. It was an honor to get to experience her work ‘in the flesh.’”

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Troy Gilbert, a Business major with a concentration in Management, echoed McClain's perspective, saying "the sound of her voice reading my favorite *Kentucky Derby* poems both clarified the mystery of her poems and brought them to life. Andrea is an exceptional reader and writer and I am very honored that I got to see her perform in person." Said Criminology major Amanda Moronta: "To hear a poet speak in person was very inspirational" and she added that the best part about witnessing Cohen's performance was that her voice seemed to lift her words off the page, creating possibilities for meaning she'd not noticed before.

Collaboration between the Writers House staff and the Merrimack faculty will continue to create opportunities for students to listen to and interact with writers whose work they've been studying.

First Annual English Awards Ceremony Held at the Writers House

by Diana Le

The first annual English Awards Ceremony paid tribute to several deserving Merrimack students. The event took place on the 24th of April at the Writers House and featured remarks from Dr. Steven Scherwatzky, English Department Chair, Dr. Ellen McWhorter, faculty advisor to the Merrimack Sigma Tau Delta chapter, Jennifer Hanselman, a 2013 English alumna, as well as poet Colleen Michaels, guest speaker for the event.

Serving as master of ceremonies, Professor Scherwatzky opened the event by providing an overview of the English Department's recent program changes (which led to the formation of the very Writers House in which the event took place) and by adding that the department's progress since last summer has helped make this one of the most memorable years he's had in his 24 year career at Merrimack.

Assistant Professor Ellen McWhorter took the podium next in order to review the Sigma Tau Delta mission and scope with the audience and to introduce Jennifer Hanselman, who completed the English program in December of 2013. Dr. McWhorter noted that the Merrimack honor society represents one of approximately 800 Sigma Tau Delta chapters internationally, and said that the high point of this year's chapter activity for her was accompanying Hanselman to the national convention in Savannah, Georgia, at which Hanselman presented her paper "Form in *Winesburg, Ohio*: A Reflection on Modernism."

Hanselman encouraged members of the Merrimack Sigma Tau Delta chapter to consider submitting papers of their own for the following year's national meeting, emphasizing that the conference environment had not been the least bit intimidating, because it consisted exclusively of student scholars who were excited to "listen" and cared about "what you have to say."

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Student Profile: Gregory Lingley

by Diana Le



As one of the small number of men enrolled in the English program here at Merrimack College, getting to know Gregory Lingley (class of 2015), is a must. The Amesbury, MA native is pursuing a career in teaching, and he is minoring in middle school Education as well as American History.

When asked how and when he knew teaching was his calling, Greg, as he likes to go by, replied, "I didn't know. I knew I didn't want to sit in a cubicle all day. I figured it out [at the] end of sophomore year. I realized I was a kid who challenged teachers in middle school and I

thought I could help those kids like

me." Greg aspires to be a positive male role model for kids struggling with the difficulties of life that seem to burgeon once they reach middle school.

Outside of the classroom, Lingley is involved with the Writers House, and is even a resident assistant on campus. It's difficult to pinpoint where exactly he gets the energy to do so much, but at least some of it can probably be credited to participating in the sport of rugby. In all aspects of his life Greg exhibits the ability to juggle so much so gracefully. He seems destined to become a role model for younger people.

If you were wondering what Greg would've done had he not been pursuing an English degree or a career in teaching, you're in luck. The busy student says he "...would probably get a business degree," for if he had to, he could have been the heir to his father's company. Something else most of us don't know about Greg is that he has a passion for cooking. If education doesn't work out, Greg knows he possesses enough interest in the culinary arts to maybe one day open up his own restaurant. Perhaps he could even combine cooking and teaching. With one year left until graduation, Greg remains a delight to his friends and classmates at Merrimack.

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The induction of two new members of Sigma Tau Delta followed Hanselman's comments. Marisa Auger (2016) and Alyssa Zahoruiko (2016) graciously accepted their honors, as each was met with applause from the audience consisting of approximately 20 students, faculty and staff. Induction into the chapter requires individuals to have completed at least three semesters of their college careers, have completed two or more English courses beyond the introductory course, and maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 in both the English program and in the college curriculum overall. Following the induction ceremony, graduating seniors Chris Mason, Jessica Reusch, and Christine Neel, who were in attendance, received their Sigma Tau Delta graduation cords.

Dr. Scherwatzky then presented the winners of the annual Aherne Poetry contest with their prizes. Third place finisher Bobby DiSorbo (class of 2014) performed a recitation of his poem "Funerals," and Rob Cannella, who took the first and second place prizes, then read "Spider" and the poem that won the contest, "Easter Eggs."

Colleen Michaels, director of the Writing Studio at Montserrat College of Art in Beverly, MA, closed the event with a talk entitled: "How to Become Famous: A Quick Guide for English Majors." Michaels read aloud the poem "Famous" by Naomi Shihab Nye, highlighting the following passage: "I want to be famous in the way a pulley is famous / or a buttonhole, not because it did anything spectacular / but because it never forgot what it could do." Michaels, whose poetry "has been made into installations on shower curtains, bar coasters and the stairs to Crane Beach in Ipswich, Massachusetts," described how life after college did not match the grand expectations she fashioned for herself when she was an undergraduate dreaming of someday becoming a great writer.

Her work slowly gained attention, she said, once she gave up on trying to be the famous poet she had fantasized about becoming and followed the examples set by Nye's pulley and button hole. Once she began offering help to other artists and members of her community, she came to understand where she belonged and recognize the part she could play in a new creative community. Most recently she initiated The Improbable Places Poetry Tours, a program in which she and her Montserrat students recite original poetry at unusual and even bizarre locations, including, but not limited to, bike shops, candy shops, auto body shops, tattoo parlors, and swimming pools. She even managed to get her name noted in a police log on one occasion, she said, after an event got so large that it spilled out into the street.

Audience members of the Sigma Tau Delta event each walked away with a button from a jar once belonging to Michaels' grandmother, which Michaels had adapted as her signature symbol based on Nye's poem: a reminder to all that they can be famous, so long as they never forget what they can do and how they can be useful.

New Courses for Fall 2014

Undead 18th Century: Origins of English Gothic Literature

Michael Jackson: Reading the King of Pop as Cultural Text

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*photos courtesy of
Danielle Jones-Pruett*

Jennifer Hanselman, Merrimack College alumna and member of Sigma Tau Delta speaking at the English Awards



Students and faculty with Jennifer Hanselman and guest speaker Colleen Michaels